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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ PUTS FINISHING TOUCHES ON HIS PSUV PARTY

REF: CARACAS 000227

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT RICHARD DOWNES,
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. President Chavez presided over the final session of the founding congress of his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) March 2 in Maracaibo. Over 1600 PSUV party delegates elected Chavez party president the week before. In Maracaibo, Chavez announced the names of 69 PSUV members who will stand for the PSUV 15-member leadership committee during intra-party elections the weekend of March 8-9. Most of Chavez' selections are prominent and loyal stalwarts, such as Foreign Minister Maduro, National Assembly President Cilia Flores, and former Vice President Jorge Rodriguez. Chavez exhorted PSUV members to generate greater grassroots activism and to foster party unity. He also suggested that neighborhoods with the best PSUV grassroots organizations ("battalions") would receive greater government resources. End Summary.

Chavez Elected PSUV President

¶2. (SBU) Over 1600 delegates to the founding congress of President Chavez' single pro-government party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), voted unanimously February 24 to make President Chavez the PSUV president. President Chavez subsequently thanked PSUV delegates for and accepted the designation. In addition, every PSUV delegate to the party's founding congress was allowed to nominate three persons for the party's 15-member leadership committee. Former Vice President Jorge Rodgriguez reportedly collected all the nominations and forwarded them to Chavez for consideration.

Chavez Hand-picks Party Leaders...

¶3. (SBU) Speaking to the closing session of the PSUV founding congress March 2 in Maracaibo, President Chavez announced the names of 69 of his supporters to be considered for the party's 15-member leadership committee. All of Venezuelan's state-run television stations carried Chavez' lengthy speech to the PSUV delegates. Chavez was flanked by an enormous red banner bearing Chavez' smiling face. The Venezuelan President said he chose the 69 names after considering "thousands" of nominations, and he urged the PSUV delegates to promote party unity and refrain from criticizing his selections. PSUV battalion members are slated to vote,

reportedly with National Electoral Council (CNE) support, the weekend of March 8 to determine the PSUV leaders.

¶14. (C) After reading the list of 69 PSUV leader nominees, Chavez designated former Military Chief of Staff and retired Army General Alberto Muller Rojas to be PSUV Vice President. From the podium, Chavez urged Muller Rojas to develop short-term tactical objectives and a long-term strategy for the PSUV. (Comment: Muller Rojas had run afoul of PSUV party organizers in 2007 when he argued that active duty military officers could and should join the PSUV. His designation as PSUV VP appears to "rehabilitate" one of Chavez' most ideological and persistent ideological supporters. End Comment). Chavez also said he planned to nominate a female PSUV VP in addition to Muller Rojas, but did not name her during his March 2 speech.

¶15. (SBU) The large majority of Chavez' nominees to the PSUV party leadership are well-known and loyal Chavistas. They include Education Minister and presidential brother Adan Chavez, former VP Jorge Rodgriguez, former ministers Aristobulo Isturiz, William Lara, Maria Cristina Iglesias, Rodrigo Cabezas, and David Velasquez. Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello, Portuguesa State Governor Antonia Munoz, Lara Governor Luis Reyes Reyes, and Libertador Mayor Freddy Bernal are on the list. The list also includes Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro, Finance Minister Rafael Isea, Secretary of the Presidency Jessie Chacon, Justice and

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Interior Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin, as well as National Assembly President Cilia Flores and NA Deputies Carlos Escarra and Dario Vivas. State-run television talk show hosts Mario Silva and Vanessa Davies also made the cut.

¶16. (C) Some 200 PSUV delegates reportedly objected to the process by which active PSUV members will select the 15-member leadership committee and issued a communique to complain. Internal disputes over the selection process are also playing out on the pro-Chavez discussion website - apporea.org. A number of Chavistas are publicly complaining that the PSUV is too "vertical" and that the weekly sessions of the founding congress did not allow for real discussion or debate. "Whatever Chavez Wants" reportedly became the informal slogan of the PSUV founding congress, squelching any dissidence.

...Sets Party Vision

¶17. (SBU) Chavez exhorted PSUV delegates to re-energize their party "battalions" and expand the party base. Chavez acknowledged that despite purportedly attracting over five million Venezuelans to register as "aspiring militants," far fewer participated in party foundation activities. Chavez also declared the PSUV a "humanistic, patriotic, ethical, moral, and revolutionary" party. He said the PSUV would adopt a socioeconomic model tied to the "fight against the (U.S.) empire and which responds to the needs of the Venezuelan people." The PSUV has not yet made public any concrete political platform. Turning to new VP Muller Rojas, Chavez suggested the PSUV develop awards for the best PSUV "battalions." He also suggested the Venezuelan government could assign more social programs ("missions") to areas where the best PSUV battalions operate.

Comment

¶18. (C) In early 2007 President Chavez announced his intention to forge a single, pro-government party by autumn of the same year. The much-delayed process of creating the PSUV has created considerable division within the PSUV (Reftel). Disputes between left-wing ideologues and the party's "Boli-bourgeoisie" opportunists continue to become public and nasty, embarrassing the Chavez government. It also led in

2007 to open political disputes with three pro-government parties that declined to merge with the PSUV. Chavez reconciled with two of the parties, the Communist Party (PCV) and Patria Para Todos (PPT), but the split with the Podemos party appears to be permanent.

¶ 9. (C) Chavez claims that he is trying to build a grassroots party from the ground up strong enough to sustain his Bolivarian movement after he steps down. Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello, the Chavista most frequently rumored to be a potential Chavez successor (and widely perceived to be an opportunist), recently suggested in a television interview that Chavez will not step down for 20 to 30 years. The PSUV party foundation process from beginning to end has been dominated by Chavez and a small group of his closest and most loyal followers, not the deliberations of the elected local delegates. Chavez' selection of big-name, loyal nominees for the party's leadership positions only reinforces that trend. The Venezuelan and PSUV president also continues to blur the distinction between party and state and for the first time is explicitly suggesting that the allocation of government resources should depend on the extent of PSUV activism.

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